

**Written Statement of Richard P. Grimes  
President/CEO of the Assisted Living Federation of America  
to the  
2005 White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee Listening Session  
December 10, 2004**

Good morning. To Chairman Hardy and Members of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee: thank you for taking the time to listen to my comments today as well as those of my fellow presenters. The commitment all of you share, a commitment to bettering the lives of aging Americans as evidenced by your selection as a Policy Committee member, is to be congratulated. The time, energy and expertise you all are devoting to this effort will help ensure that the 2005 White House Conference on Aging promotes effective dialogue, policy, research and practices in a manner that will serve to improve the quality of life for all of Americans as we age. Again, thank you for the role you are playing in this important event.

I also want to thank the Alliance for Aging Research for hosting today's listening session, an organization which shares our belief that we do need more evidence-based research on aging-related issues in this country. I am here to tell you about our association and the work of our members, and to highlight the issues that we see as most timely and relevant as you develop your priorities for research and policy through the development of the conference proceedings.

**ALFA and the Growth of Assisted Living Nationwide**

I am the President/CEO of the Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA). ALFA is the largest association dedicated exclusively to the assisted living industry, and we have over 5,000 for-profit and not-for-profit provider members, as well as affiliates in 40 states. ALFA promotes the philosophy of informed consumer choice and quality of life for seniors in assisted living communities.

It is appropriate that this country's baby boom generation has been identified as a core sector for focus by the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. A lot has changed in aging policy and practice since the last White House Conference on Aging in 1995. Let me share with you one striking example of this as it relates to assisted living. One of ALFA's Board members recently pointed out that "assisted living" was not even listed in the yellow pages of a community phone book at the time of the last White House Conference on Aging. That is hard for us to imagine now--just ten years later. Today, assisted living is a significant part of the long-term care sector in this country and it is a phenomenon that has become very much a part of American vernacular and culture. Most of us have a friend or relative living in an assisted living community.

**Demographic Shift Underway**

In fact, currently over one million Americans receive assistance with long-term care within assisted living communities. As you are well aware, with this country's changing demographics, this number will only grow. According to the Census Bureau, by 2040 the

current number of Americans aged 65 and older will more than double. Moreover, in that same year, it is projected that there will be 14 million Americans over the age of 85, more than triple the country's current population in that age group. These shifts are due in part to improved health care and medical technology and services. As a result, many of us can count on living well into our eighties and nineties, and beyond.

But the longer average life span also brings with it an increased percentage of Americans who will want and will also need outside assistance with activities of daily living. Some of us have already reached an age or level of need where we are looking for help. Others of us, such as the 77 million baby boomers in this country, are researching assisted living as we seek assistance for parents and other loved ones and as we ponder our own future long-term care needs in the years to come.

As we have all seen, this public demand for assistance with long-term care is shifting away from a more institutional type of setting, such as a skilled nursing home, and instead toward more home and community-based options. This trend is not only evident in the growing voices of the American public, it is being strongly underscored by policymakers, as seen in the recent U.S. Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision as well as this Administration's efforts to promote home and community-based services.

### **The White House Conference on Aging Agenda**

The 2005 White House Conference on Aging has formally designated several areas of focus for its agenda--and assisted living is very relevant to several of these issue areas. Let me briefly address each relevant topic area.

#### *Planning Along the Lifespan*

As alluded to above, many of today's baby boomers are looking into assisted living as an option for receiving assistance with long-term care needs. Most are doing research on behalf of a parent or loved one. Others are planning ahead, purchasing long-term care insurance and taking strides to determine what kind of setting might best fit their needs, should they turn to assisted living communities for help in future years. More dialogue and research is necessary so that we all have a better understanding of the best ways to plan for future needs.

#### *Our Community*

As assisted living grows and more Americans indicate a desire to "age in place" assisted by our provider members, ALFA is working to ensure that there is maximum opportunity for them to do so. Included as part of our public policy platform is the concept that people should be able to live in a setting that best meets their needs, whether that setting is an assisted living community or not. Some people do have the support they need and want at home. For others, "home" becomes the assisted living community--and our members are doing their best to allow these individuals to remain at home for as long as their needs can be met in a way that ensures the highest quality, safety, and ability to make informed choices.

### *Health and Long-Term Living*

More research and dialogue is needed that centers on ways to promote quality of life for all aging Americans. Part of ALFA's core mission is the promotion of effective practices that are based in research, with an end toward high quality of life for assisted living residents. It is our hope that the White House Conference on Aging can help to move such efforts forward.

### *Social Engagement*

Assisted living, by its design, offers a setting that can promote companionship and reduce unwanted isolation. The assistance residents can receive with activities of daily living is a central facet of assisted living but a focus on social interaction is a vital component of this residential option as well. Assisted living communities also often promote physical activity, activities related to religious services, and assistance with transportation. Therefore, assisted living is an important part of the discussion in this issue area as well.

### *Marketplace*

Assisted living providers are becoming an increasingly large sector of the business community in this country, and they can help to ensure that older Americans get access to the services and assistive devices that will best meet their needs.

### **Conclusion**

I have alluded to ALFA's core policy principles, and I have included a copy of ALFA's one page Policy Platform as an appendix, so that it will be part of my recorded testimony here today. This document encompasses ALFA's philosophy and goals with relation to the furtherance of effective dialogue and public policy around aging and long-term care.

Let me close my remarks by saying once again that I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. I hope my remarks this morning have provided you with some insight into the growing role of assisted living in the lives of many aging baby boomers and their loved ones. I also hope my remarks have provided you with helpful background, clarifying for you ALFA's role in promoting high quality and accessible assisted living care. Finally, I ask that you consider the following specific requests:

- (1) Assign a delegate slot to ALFA to ensure that assisted living is included in the dialogue at the White House Conference on Aging;
- (2) Build on our attached Policy Platform and use the language included there as the basis for a formal resolution; and
- (3) Ensure that assisted living and the continuum of long-term care options are considered as important research and policy agenda items during the conference sessions.

Thank you for your time today and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.